

Report 2402



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An Archaeological Watching Brief at The Assembly House, Norwich.

ENF124639



Prepared for
The Assembly House (Norwich) Ltd



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Location:	Assembly House, Theatre Street, Norwich
District:	Norwich
Grid Ref.:	TG 2277 0831
HER No.:	608, ENF124639
SM No.:	14
OASIS Ref.:	84267
Client:	The Assembly House (Norwich) Ltd
Dates of Fieldwork:	29 April, 4 May, 22 September, 7 January 2011

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was conducted at The Assembly House, Norwich, during construction of an extension to the rear of the building in April 2010 to January 2011. Limited evidence of previous structures that were present on the site was uncovered during the monitoring along with a suggestion of the skinning of animals and an unfinished bone skate.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Improvement works to the rear of the Assembly House in Norwich involved the construction of a new toilet block and kitchen area. The foundations and groundworks for these structures were not extensive and covered two small areas of the car park. Work was carried out on the toilet block in April to May 2010 and work on the kitchen in September 2010 (Fig. 1). Additional works for a 'fat trap' were undertaken in January 2011.

This work was commissioned and funded by The Assembly House (Norwich) Ltd.

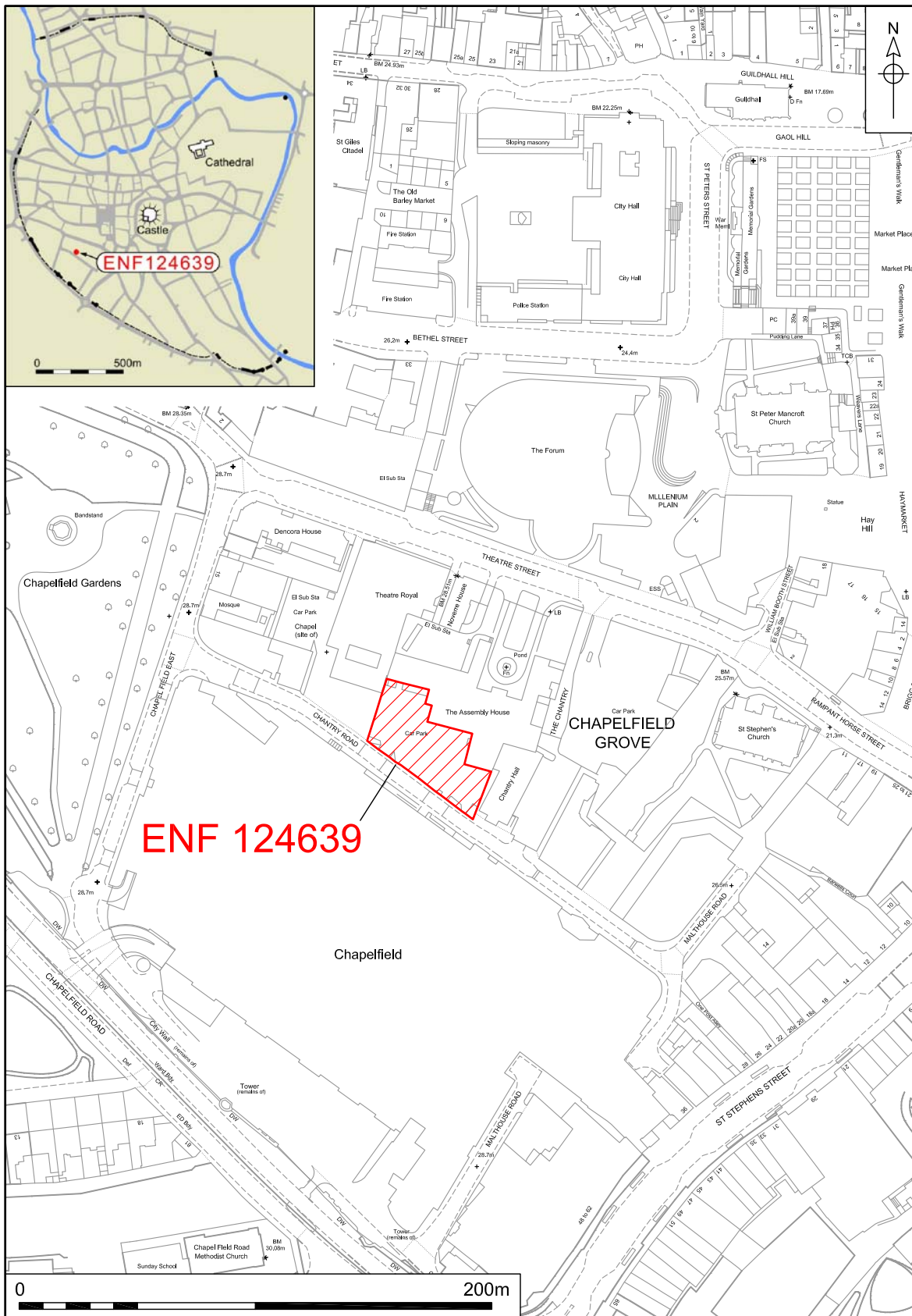
The work was undertaken to fulfil a planning condition set by Norwich City Council (Ref. 09/01402/F) and a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (Ref. CNW040482). It was conducted in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by NAU Archaeology (Ref. BAU2402).

The programme of work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, following the guidelines set out in *Planning and Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by the Local Planning Authority about the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

The site archive is currently held by NAU Archaeology and on completion of the project will be deposited with the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service (NMAAS), following the relevant policies on archiving standards.

2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Norwich is built on a solid geology of Upper Chalk and Norwich Crag, overlain by a drift geology of Norwich Brickearth and glacial sands and gravels (Funnell 2005). The soil type in this region is a mixture of argillic brown earths and brown earths



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Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:2500

and sands, with earthy peat soils along the course of the river. Urban settlement and activity has further mixed these soils and affected the geology.

The Assembly House is situated on Theatre Street, adjacent to the Theatre Royal. The street slopes downhill from Chapelfield Gardens to St. Stephen's Plain and The Assembly House lies above the 25m contour line, at approx. 27m OD. This is an urban area close to the centre of the city and is known to have been settled from at least the medieval period.

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The following provides a summary of the main Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER) entries for this site and its immediate surrounds. The numbers referred to below all relate to record numbers cited in the NHER.

The Assembly House (NHER 618, SM14) was built in 1754 by Thomas Ivory and is a Grade I listed building. It was erected on the site of the former College of St Mary in the Fields (NHER Mon 505), established in c.1248. Undercrofts incorporated into the present building have been dated to the 15th century and there are records of a mansion house being built on the site in 1610 (NHER Mon 882/1263). A brick grave and several skulls were recorded during work to the front of the building in 1901 (NHER Site 1861).

Extensive archaeological works carried out prior to construction of The Forum, on the opposite side of Theatre Street, uncovered evidence of Saxon and medieval settlement and also included the remains of a late medieval public house (NHER 26437).

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The objective of this watching brief was to mitigate the impact of the proposed works in line with the Archaeological Brief. Where archaeological remains were identified, and these could not be preserved *in situ*, the impact of the scheme was minimised by appropriate levels of archaeological excavation and recording (preservation by record).

The Archaeological Brief stipulated constant attendance by an archaeologist during any excavation works.

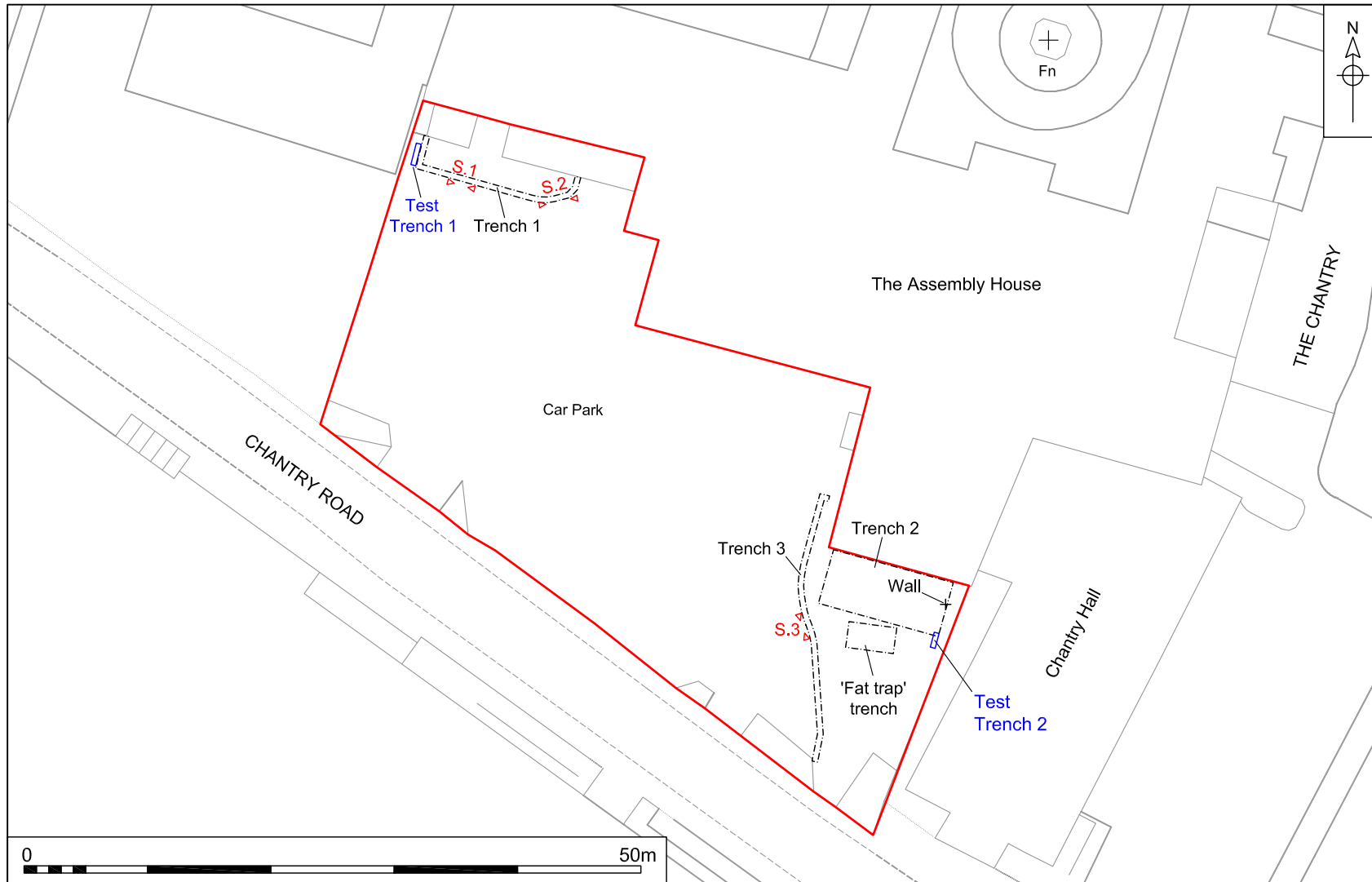
Machine excavation was carried out with a wheeled JCB-type excavator using a toothed ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision.

All finds, other than those which were obviously modern, were retained for inspection.

No environmental samples were taken.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NAU Archaeology pro forma. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales. Colour, monochrome and digital photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits where appropriate.

Site conditions were good, with the work taking place in fair weather.



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Figure 2. Trench location. Scale 1:500

5.0 RESULTS

On 29 April 2010 two small test areas (Test Trenches 1 and 2) were excavated in the car park of the Assembly House (Fig. 2).

Test Trench 1 (Plate 1) was excavated to the west of the old store, at the edge of the proposed site of the new ladies toilets. The trench measured 1.8m x 0.4m and was excavated to a depth of 1.25m. The upper ground surface (1) was composed of gravel and hardcore and was 0.2m deep. Beneath this was a 0.3m deep layer of dark brown sandy clay (2) containing occasional chalk flecks and fragments of mortar and ceramic building material (CBM). This deposit overlay a thick layer (at least 0.75m deep) of medium brown sandy clay (3) containing very occasional flecks of mortar and chalk and whole oyster shell.



Plate 1. Test trench 1, looking north

Test Trench 2 (Plate 2) was excavated to the south-east of the Assembly House building, at the eastern edge of the proposed new cold rooms. The trench measured 1.25m x 0.4m and was excavated to a depth of 1.7m. The upper ground surface was tarmac (0.1m thick) (4), overlying a layer of concrete (5) 0.2m thick. Beneath the concrete was a layer of dark brown clayey sand (6), 1.4m deep and containing occasional flint, CBM, and oyster shells. Fragments of pottery, and clay

tobacco pipe stem were recovered from this layer. At the base of this, a brick wall (7) ran diagonally across the trench from south-west to north-east. The bricks were bonded with a pale yellow sandy mortar.

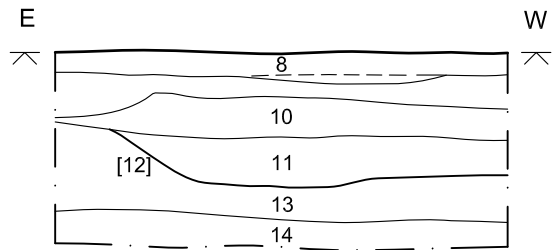


Plate 2. Test Trench 2, looking north

On 5 May 2010 a foundation trench (Trench 1) was excavated for the new toilet block. This ran east-south-east from the southern end of the previously excavated Test Trench 1 for a distance of 9.4m, before curving to the north-east to join the main building, adjacent to the main rear entrance (Plate 3). The trench was 0.46m wide and excavated to a maximum depth of 1.7m. At a distance of 3.3m from the western end of the trench was uncovered what initially appeared to be the footings of an old brick wall (11), made of red brick and creamy white mortar and running perpendicular to the trench, and overlain by a layer of yellowy-brown heavy clay (10) (Fig. 3). As machining of the trench continued this apparent wall was established as a layer of brick and mortar rubble (Plate 4).

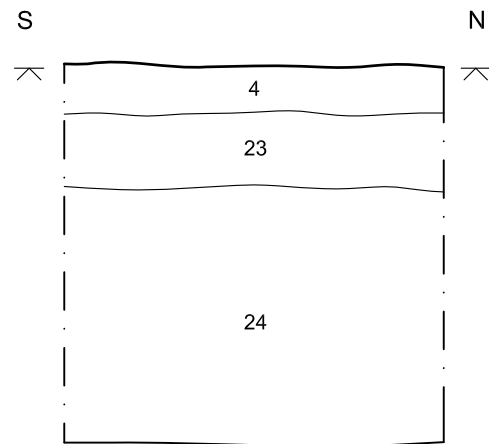
Towards the eastern end of the trench, the upper rubble layer (15) (Fig. 4) produced fragments of a large blue and white transfer ware dish and other late post-medieval to early modern pottery.

The sticky brown clay layer (13) produced animal bone (see 6.4 below).



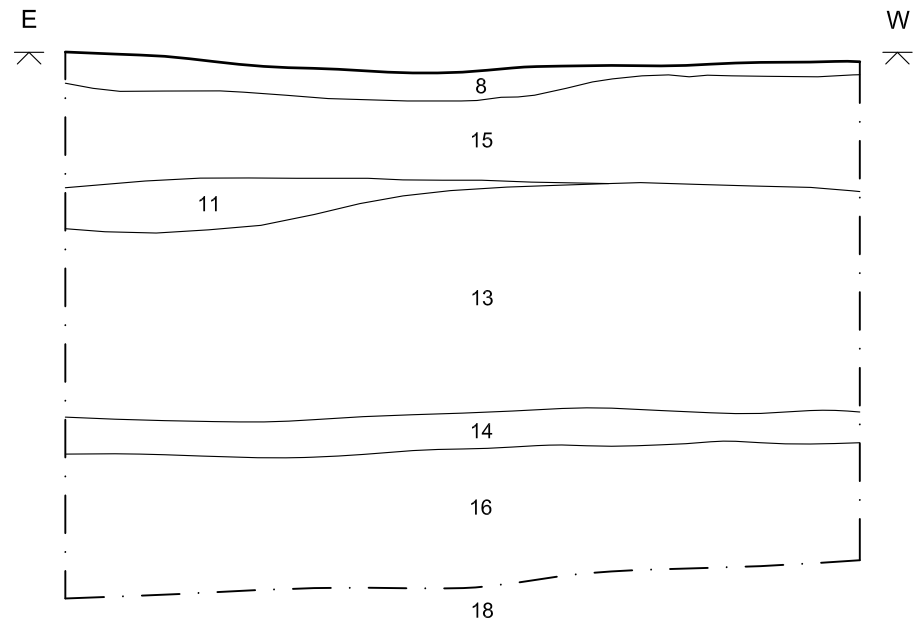
North facing

Figure 3. Section 1 near west end of Trench 1, looking north. Scale 1:20



East facing

Figure 5. Sample section 3 through the middle of Trench 3. Scale 1:20



North facing

Figure 4. Section 2 near east end of Trench 1. Scale 1:20





Plate 3. Trench 1, looking east



Plate 4. Trench 1, south-facing section showing chalk and brick layer (11)

On 22 September 2010, groundworks were carried out to allow completion of the new cold rooms to the south-east of the existing building. A decision had been made to erect the new structure on a concrete raft, so deep foundation trenches did not need to be dug and, instead, an area 10m by 4.5m (Trench 2) was excavated to a depth of 0.37m from the existing ground surface (Plates 5 and 6).



Plate 5. Trench 2, machining



Plate 6. Trench 2, north-facing section

This removed only modern deposits: a tarmac surface (context 4) and underlying hardcore rubble layer (context 19) (Plate 6). These overlay a layer of buried garden soil (20), which was identified in the base of the excavated area. A late post-medieval or modern drain (21), brick-built and capped by concrete was also removed. The concrete (5) identified in Test Trench 2 may have formed part of this structure. Beneath the drain (which cut the buried garden soil layer (20)) at a distance of 1.85m from the back wall of the Assembly House and 1.25m from the eastern boundary wall, at a depth of 0.6m below the current ground surface, the remains of an old red brick wall (22) were identified, running east-west (parallel to the back wall of the building and perpendicular to the boundary). The orientation of this wall corresponded with a change of brick type in the boundary wall and it is possible that part of the latter was once part of a building, three sides of which had been demolished. A brick wall was identified in Test Trench 2, 2.5m to the south of this point, but it was found at a much greater depth (1.7m) and ran north-east to south-west.



Plate 7, Trench 3, looking south

To the west of the concrete raft area, a narrow utilities trench (Trench 3) was opened which measured 0.46m wide by 1m deep (Plate 7). This trench ran from the corner of the basement stairs, southwards past the raft area for the new cold rooms, and then curved south-east to connect to the base of a gas junction box adjacent to the southern boundary wall (Fig. 2). The trench encountered several modern drains and cable lines and, in places, the depth of the trench was

increased slightly to pass underneath these, but no archaeological features were noted (Fig. 5). The maximum depth of the trench at any point was 1.3m. A few fragments of clay tobacco pipe were recovered from the buried garden soil (24).

On 7 January 2011, a large trench, approx. 3.9m long by 2.1m wide and 2.8m deep, was excavated to provide for a “fat trap” – to collect grease from liquid kitchen waste (Plate 8). This cut through a layer of tarmac 0.08m deep (context 4) and a layer of crushed concrete approx. 0.6m deep (19), which overlay a mixed deposit (25), approx. 1.1m deep, largely composed of a thick layer of mid to dark grey-brown clay silt with brick rubble over a thinner layer or patches of creamy pink mortar and brick rubble, over a thickish deposit of mid brownish-grey silt with rubble. The deposit was given a single context number as it was not possible to properly define individual deposit layers within this mix, nor was it not possible to determine from which of the different parts any finds stemmed. Fragments of pottery, glass, animal bone and ceramic building material were recovered from deposit (25).



Plate 8 The ‘fat trap’ trench

6.0 THE FINDS

Introduction

The finds and environmental material from the site is presented in tabular form with basic quantitative information in Appendix 2a: Finds by Context. Detailed information on the finds is included in the separate reports below. Supporting tables for these contributions are included in the Appendices.

6.1 Pottery

by Sarah Percival

A small assemblage of pottery comprising a total of six sherds weighing 735g was recovered from two contexts (Appendix 3). Single sherds from a glazed red earthenware vessel, the rim from an English stoneware jar and a transitional Surrey Whiteware dish were found in layer (6), suggesting a 17th-century date for this context.

Three sherds of modern pottery including a large sherd from a late glazed red earthenware bowl and two refitting sherds from a large transfer printed plate with blue willow pattern design were found in layer (15).

A further two sherds were recovered during monitoring of excavations prior to the insertion of a fat trap (25). These were the rim and neck from a Frechen stoneware Bartman jug and the rim of a Glazed Red Earthenware bowl. The Bartman jug is similar to example in the Museum of London collection dated to 1485 -1714 (http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/ceramics/pages/object.asp?obj_id=149022).

6.2 Ceramic Building Material

by Sarah Percival

A total of four pieces of ceramic building material weighing 328g was recovered from two contexts (Appendix 4). All are made in a range of red sandy fabrics and all are post-medieval. The assemblage includes a piece of brick with vitrified header and a heavily worn floor tile from layer (6). Similar vitrified bricks have been found at Dragon Hall and were perhaps intended to have been used in Tudor diaper work (Anderson 2005, 91). Single fragments of roof tile and brick were recovered from buried garden soil (24).

A single brick and a fragment of flat roof tile were collected during further monitoring work (25). The brick measures 220mm by 110mm by 50mm equivalent to Drury's late brick type LB12 in a dense, fine, sandy, orange fabric with no visible inclusions (Drury 1993, 164). The brick has a diagonal stacking mark across one long edge.

6.3 Clay Pipe

by Sarah Percival

A total of eight pieces of clay tobacco pipe stem weighing 44g were recovered. The clay pipe is not closely datable.

6.4 Glass

by Sarah Percival

A total of six shards of glass weighing 1,050g were collected during archaeological monitoring (25). The glass is all of 17th to 18th century date and includes vessel and bottle glass

6.4.1 Vessel Glass

A body shard and a base in thin natural green glass are from a pharmaceutical phial. The base is pushed-in to form a pointed kick and is similar to a 17th or early

18th century example from Norwich Castle (Shepherd 2009, fig.10, SF7570 no.62). Shepherd notes that pharmaceutical phials are very common within 17th to 18th century assemblages and were used for a variety of pharmaceutical and cosmetic preparations (Shepherd 2009, 852).

6.4.2 Bottle Glass

Four fragments of wine bottle were recovered. These include the base from a free blown late 17th to 18th century 'English' wine bottle in olive green glass (Shepherd 2009, fig.10.49, SF12, no.88) and the rim and neck from a similar bottle (Shepherd 2009, fig.10.49, SF159, no.89) plus a base from a further flask or bottle and a miscellaneous body shard. Such bottles are common from the later 17th century and continue to be used throughout the 18th century (Shepherd 2009, 852).

6.5 Animal Bone

by Julie Curl

6.5.1 Methodology

Assessment of the animal bone was carried out following a modified version of guidelines by English Heritage (Davis, 1992). All of the bone was examined to determine the range of species and elements present. A note was also made of butchering and any indications of skinning, working and other modifications. When possible, a record was made of ages and any other relevant information, such as pathologies. Counts and weights were noted for each context, with additional counts for each species identified. As this is a small assemblage, the information has been input directly into a table in this report.

6.5.2 The assemblage – provenance and preservation

A total of 383g of faunal remains, consisting of five pieces, was produced from a single fill (13) (Appendix 5). The remains from this deposit (thought to be a buried garden soil) are in good condition; some wear is evident that might suggest the remains have been disturbed from their original place of disposal.

A further thirteen pieces of butchered animal bone were collected from context (25). This material was not subjected to full analysis as it is entirely unstratified.

6.5.3 Species range, modifications and discussion

Two species were identified: cattle and sheep/goat. The cattle remains are derived from both adult and juvenile animals, while the sheep/goat is from an adult individual. The sheep/goat metacarpal shows an ossified haematoma on the posterior shaft, an irregular bone formation that results from pressure on the bone and internal bleeding and would suggest a tethered animal.

All three metapodials in this assemblage show fine cuts that are likely to have occurred when the animals were skinned and dismembered. In addition, one of the cattle metatarsals shows signs of working to produce a skate (below 6.4.3.1). Canid gnawing was evident, indicating the remains were accessible to scavenger activity.

6.5.3.1 Bone working evidence

A single cattle metatarsal from (13) is an unfinished bone skate. The distal end of the bone has been chopped either side to form an upswept point. There is some

evidence for a hole at the distal end, but the majority of this part of the point has broken away. The proximal half of the shaft has been shaved on one side, but the proximal end of the bone has been gnawed away. Some polishing can be seen on the posterior surface.

Metapodials of cattle and equid have long been used for producing ice-skates. Pre-Roman examples exist in Europe, but in the British Isles they generally occur from the 8th to 13th centuries (MacGregor 1985). The majority of examples from Thetford and Norwich have been dated as Late Saxon or medieval (Margeson 1993, 218), but a post-medieval skate and a possible unfinished example of the same date were found in the fill of the barbican ditch at Norwich Castle (Huddle 2009, 888). Huddle also notes that 'bone skates were in use in London until the 18th century and could still be found in the Fens at the turn of the last century' (Smith 1848, Lanyard 1908, 43).

Trimming of skates can vary, with the skate from the Assembly Rooms most resembling a medieval example found at Greyfriars (Huddle 2007, p207, SF803, Fig.5.96). The pointed and upswept toes are common features of ice-skates (MacGregor 1985) and may be intended to help performance on irregular ice or snow.

The example from the Assembly House may have broken while being worked, or may have succumbed to scavenger activity (with the gnawing on the proximal end) before it was completed. There is some polishing evident on the posterior surface, a shine that would normally be achieved in use, so it could have broken when first used. Or it is possible that the broken skate had an alternative use after damage occurred – for smoothing or rubbing in the preparation of textiles or leather – and it was this that caused the polished flatter surface.



Plate 9. Unfinished bone skate from layer (13)

6.5.4 Conclusions

The assemblage appears to derive from skinning waste, with one of the bones also being worked. It is possible that all of the metapodials (and perhaps the other bone) had been collected for working and might suggest waste from such activity.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

The depth at which the wall in Test Trench 2 was identified suggests that it would have formed part of a cellar or 'undercroft'. The difference in orientation to the wall identified in the open area Trench 2 makes it unlikely that the two walls bear any relation to one another.

In 1973, demolition of 'The Chantry', immediately adjacent to this site, revealed a wall of flint rubble in yellow mortar running southwest to northeast across the site (NHER 371, Site 1069) and another wall orientated towards the north-west. These were interpreted as medieval walls belonging to St Mary's Chapel-in-the-Field (NHER 372) and it is possible that the wall identified in Test Trench 2 is also one of the walls associated with St Mary's.

Limited evidence of previous structures on the site was uncovered, along with fragments of post-medieval pottery, glass, and clay tobacco pipe, and an unfinished bone skate. The evidence of skinning of animals from the waste present at the site is not datable in itself but given the date of the pottery and ceramic building material present it is likely to be of post-medieval date, as is the bone skate although most similar examples found in archaeological contexts appear to have been assigned to the medieval period or earlier. Although the analysed faunal remains assemblage is small and from one feature only, it is worth noting that it is associated with industrial activity (skinning animals and bone-working) rather than (the more usual) food residues.

Recommendations for future work based upon this report will be made by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology.

Acknowledgements

Fieldwork was conducted by Steve Hickling, Lilly Hodges and Suzanne Westall. The finds were washed by Michelle Bull and processed by Sarah Percival. The pottery, ceramic building material, clay pipe and glass were analysed by Sarah Percival and the animal bone was analysed by Julie Curl. The report was edited by Jayne Bown and illustrated and produced by David Dobson.

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Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Category	Description	Period
1	Deposit	Gravel and hardcore layer	Modern
2	Deposit	Dark brown sandy clay silt	Post-medieval
3	Deposit	Yellow-brown sandy clay silt	Med./Post-med.
4	Deposit	Tarmac surface	Modern
5	Deposit	Concrete (Same as 19)	Modern
6	Deposit	Dark brown clayey sand	Med./Post-med.
7	Masonry	Brick wall	Med./Post-med.
8	Deposit	Very loose soil (upper ground surface) (Same as 1?)	Modern
9	Deposit	Dark brown clay silt	Modern
10	Deposit	Reddish brown silty clay	Modern
11	Deposit	Chalk and red brick	Post-medieval
12	Cut	Possible construction or demolition cut	Post-medieval
13	Deposit	Dark brown sandy clay silt (Same as 2??)	Post-medieval
14	Deposit	Yellow-brown sandy clay silt (Same as 3??)	Med./Post-med.
15	Deposit	Sandy-coloured rubble (Same as 1?)	Modern
16	Deposit	Dark brown sticky clay	Med./Post-med.
17	Cut	Possible construction cut	Post-medieval
18	Deposit	Crumbly yellow-brown silt at base of Trench 1	Med./Post-med.
19	Deposit	Beige sand and rubble mix (Same as 5)	Med./Post-med.
20	Deposit	Buried garden soil	Post-medieval
21	Masonry	Modern drain	Modern
22	Masonry	Old red brick wall	Post-medieval
23	Deposit	Modern make-up/hardcore deposits	Modern
24	Deposit	Old, buried garden soil (same as 20)	Med./Post-med.
25	Deposit	Finds collected during insertion of fat trap	Med./Post-med.

Appendix 1b: OASIS Feature summary

Period	Type	No.
Post-medieval	Wall	2
	Foundation trench	2

Appendix 2a: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Qty	Wt	Period	Notes
6	Pottery	3	21g	Post-medieval	
6	Ceramic Building Material	1	142g	Post-medieval	Brick
6	Ceramic Building Material	1	154g	Post-medieval	Floor tile
13	Animal Bone	5	383g	Unknown	
13	Clay Pipe	3	14	Modern	
15	Pottery	3	714g	Modern	
15	Clay Pipe	2	3g	Modern	Stem
24	Clay Pipe	2	11g	Modern	Stem
24	Ceramic Building Material	1	11g	Post-medieval	Roof tile
24	Ceramic Building Material	1	21g	Post-medieval	Brick
25	Pottery	2	415g	Post-medieval	
25	Clay Pipe	2	16g	Post-medieval	Stem
25	Ceramic Building Material	1	2079g	Post-medieval	Brick
25	Ceramic Building Material	1	52g	Post-medieval	Roof tile
25	Glass	6	1050g	Post-medieval	Bottle glass
25	Animal Bone	13	505g	Unknown	

Appendix 2b: OASIS Finds Summary

Period	Material	Total
Post-medieval	Ceramic Building Material	6
	Clay Pipe	2
	Glass	6
	Pottery	5
Modern	Clay Pipe	6
	Pottery	3
Unknown	Animal Bone	18

Appendix 3: Pottery

Context	Fabric	Form	Qty	Wt	Spotdate	Comment
6	GRE		1	4	16th-18th c.	
6	ESW	Jar	1	7	17th-19th c.	
6	SWWT	Dish	1	10	15th 16th	
15	REFW	Plate	2	327	L.18th-20th c.	TP blue willow
15	LGRE	Bowl	1	387	18th-19th c	
25	GRE	Bowl	1	62	16th-18th c.	
25	GSW	Jug	1	353	1485 - 1714	Bartman jug

Key: GRE - Glazed red earthenware; ESW – English Stoneware; SWWR - Surrey Whiteware transitional; REFW - Refined white earthenwares; LGRE - Late glazed red earthenware; GSW German Stoneware (Frechen)

Appendix 4: Ceramic Building Material

Ctxt	Fabric	Type	Form	No	Wt	Thickness	Note	Spotdate
6	Red sandy with quartz and occasional grog	Brick	Late Brick	1	142g	42	Vitrified	Post-medieval
6	Medium red sandy fabric with coarse flint	Floor tile		1	154g	39	Upper surface worn smooth, some possible glaze on sides	Post-medieval
24	Medium orange sandy with grog	Roof tile	Flat	1	11g			Post-medieval
24	coarse sandy fabric with small chalk and quartz inclusions	Brick	Late Brick	1	21g		Mortar on one surface	Post-medieval

Appendix 5: Animal Bone

Ctxt	Ctxt Qty	Ctxt Wt(g)	Species Group	Species	NISP	Ages	Butchering	Work	Comments
13	5	383	LDM	Cattle	3	a + j	c, ch	1	2 x metatarsals (1 x adult, 1 x juv), 1 x cut and chopped rib. One of metatarsals is an unfinished skate. Canid gnawing evident.
			S-MDM	Sheep/goat	1	a	c		metacarpal, small ossified haematoma on posterior surface
			LDM	Mammal	1		ch, c		

Key:

Species Group: S-MDM = Small-Medium Domestic Mammal; LDM = Large Domestic Mammal, M= Mammal

NISP = Number of Individual Species elements Present.

Age = Estimate age based on fusion of bones and/or tooth wear; a = adult, j = juvenile

Butchering = c = cut, ch = chopped

Work = Probable worked material/working waste.